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## Big River

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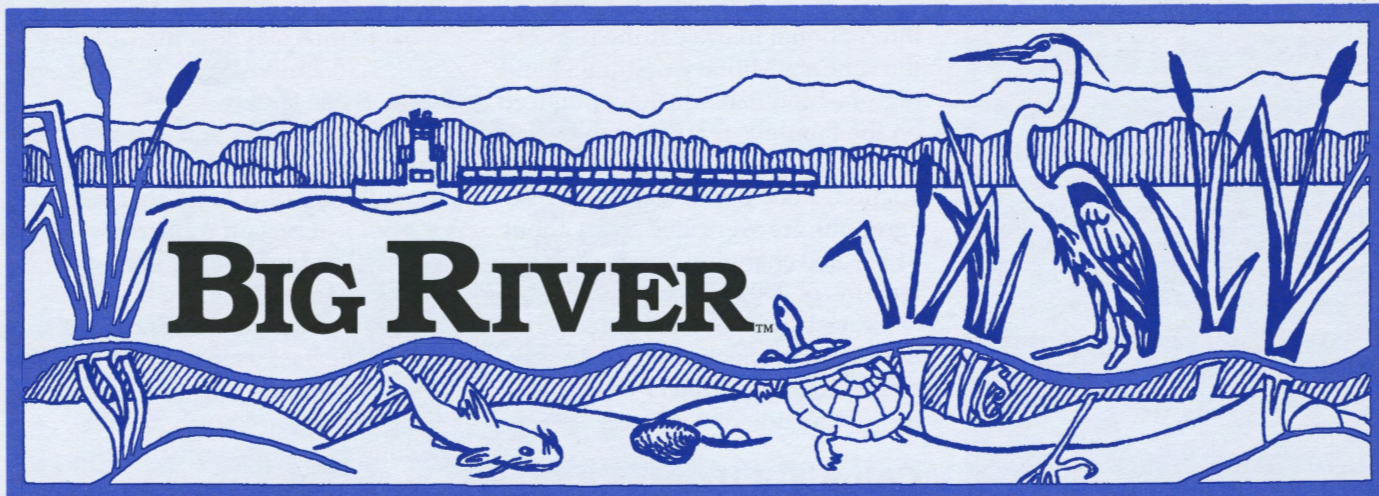
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April 1998

The monthly newsletter for people who live, work or play on the Upper Mississippi River

Vol. 6, No. 4 \$2.75

## Great Blue Herons — Lonely Hunters, Tenement Dwellers

By Pamela Eyden

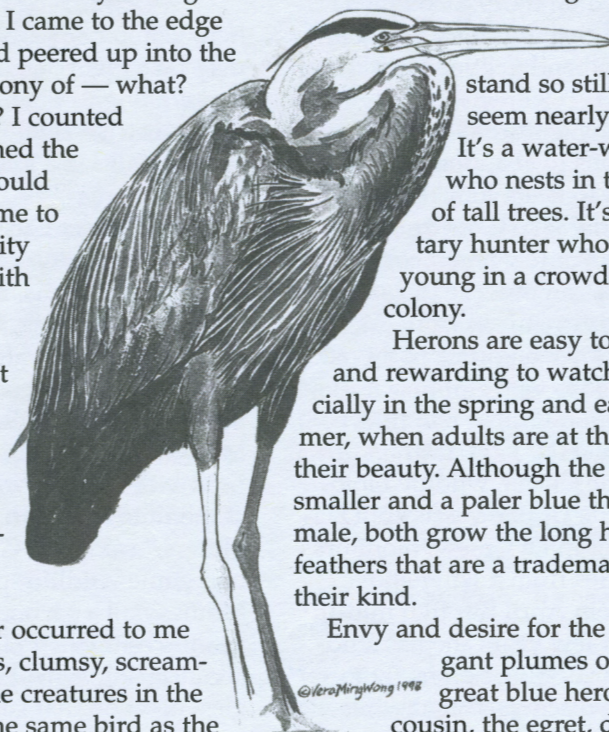
One afternoon many years ago I was walking on an island up north when I heard a series of guttural screams and cries that rooted me to the spot. It sounded like a battle of giant lizards. I crept cautiously through the woods until I came to the edge of a clearing and peered up into the treetops at a colony of — what? — pterodactyls? I counted the nests, sketched the birds as best I could and hurried home to call the University of Minnesota with my discovery.

"Oh, yes," said a woman at the Bell Museum, "they're great blue herons. We know that rookery."

Great blue herons? It never occurred to me that the raucous, clumsy, screaming, quarrelsome creatures in the treetops were the same bird as the

solitary, elegant, ethereal blue heron.

The great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*) truly is a bird of many contrasts; standing four feet tall with a wingspan of six feet, it is one of the continent's largest birds,



yet it can stand so still as to seem nearly invisible. It's a water-wader who nests in the tops of tall trees. It's a solitary hunter who raises its young in a crowded colony.

Heron are easy to identify and rewarding to watch, especially in the spring and early summer, when adults are at the peak of their beauty. Although the female is smaller and a paler blue than the male, both grow the long head feathers that are a trademark of their kind.

Envy and desire for the extravagant plumes of the great blue heron and its cousin, the egret, drove an

(Heron continued on page 2)

## Marge's — Breakfast to Buffalo

By Mi Ae Lipe-Butterbrodt

The tyrannosaur lurches forward, its toothy jaws gaping wide, ready to pounce on the folks in the parking lot. Next to it, a jolly bear laughs, while a nearby Indian stands, arms folded defiantly across his chest.

These and other intricately carved wooden figures greet visitors to Marge's Lakeview Restaurant and Lounge on Highway 35 in Onalaska, Wisconsin. The restaurant and its bar overlook the magnificent vista of Lake Onalaska.

(Marge's continued on page 4)

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## It's Mating Season...

**E**arly in April and May, the first males to arrive move into existing nests and if they haven't found a mate yet, try to attract one. It's a busy time. First of all, they have to defend their nests from other males who try to steal sticks to build their own. Then they have to preen and pose to impress single females. When a female sees a male she likes, she flies in and settles on a nearby branch. The male, playing hard to get (or is he just confused?), often tries to drive her away. If she's still interested, she persists until he changes his mind and invites her onto the nest.

After that there's sometimes a stick-exchange ritual, a 30-second circle flight — the only time herons fly with necks stretched out straight, like cranes — and mutual grooming.

Hérons are said to be as meticulous about their grooming as cats. Oil from a special gland on the tail keeps the feathers glossy and water-repellent. But they also have a small, comb-like, serrated hook on the middle talons of their feet that is good for straightening feathers and scratching up the patches of "powderdown" — special feathers that disintegrate easily and serve as a cleaning agent.

Poetically enough, the only place the heron can't groom itself is behind its own head, and this is what mates do for each other to affirm the bond between them. They give up grooming each other when the young are hatched.

Next year they choose a new mate and start all over again. ■■■

(Hérons continued from page 1)

international market at the turn of the century. Military costumers and high-fashion haberdashers pounced on the fabulous feathers, which sold for \$32 an ounce. In 1902, at a single auction, 3,000 pounds of heron and egret plumes were sold, with about \$1,536,000 changing hands over the remains of 200,000 birds.

Protective laws were passed and the Audubon Society was formed out of the public outcry over the near extinction of egrets and herons.

### Colonial Life

It's not unusual for hundreds, even thousands, of herons to nest together in a colony. The nests are crude-looking assemblages of sticks and twigs several feet across in the canopy of tall trees — sometimes 60 to 100 feet off the ground.

"You could follow your nose to a rookery if you wanted to, but I don't know if most people would care to go in there," said La Crosse, Wisconsin, birder Fred Leshner. "Besides the stink and nettles and mosquitoes and poison ivy, the young birds tend to regurgitate their fish dinners when they get alarmed. It's the only place I've ever been rained on by 10-inch bullheads." (If that doesn't work, they turn around and get you with the other end.)

Too many disturbances may cause herons to abandon their nests, so it's best to keep your distance, for the birds' sake if not your own, but there are a few heron colonies that people can observe by boat. One, just downstream from the Sabula, Iowa, bridge, can be observed from the road.

### Waiting for Dinner

Christine Custer, wildlife biologist with the Upper Mississippi Science Center in La Crosse, monitors the rookeries from a wing-above Cessna, from April through mid-July. The last few years she has studied how far nesting herons fly to feed. She's discovered that while

most herons stay less than 10 kilometers (6.2 miles) from the rookery, some fly as far as 60.

"This surprises and amazes me," said Custer. "It's a big investment of energy for a bird to fly that far. And it's not just certain rookeries — each colony has birds flying short and long distances."

Custer said great blue herons prefer the backwaters of the Mississippi to its Main Channel. Except for that, they are pretty flexible, willing to fish offshore of a ripped bank or from logs.

Hérons' standard fishing technique is to stand and wait, but they will also jump with both feet and dip a wing to startle the fish, if necessary. Herons on the Upper Mississippi don't have it as easy as some

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*In 1902, at a single auction, 3,000 pounds of heron and egret plumes were sold, with about \$1,536,000 changing hands over the remains of 200,000 birds.*

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herons in other parts of the U.S. "It may take them one hour of standing and waiting to catch a big fish, half that to catch a smaller fish," said Custer. "This is a low rate compared to coastal areas."

This summer Custer will fly above heron colonies in the Vermillion River Bottoms, between Hastings and Red Wing, Minnesota, and at Pigs Eye Island at St. Paul. Pigs Eye Island may be one of the oldest traditional heron colony sites in Minnesota.

"We think it may have been here at the time of the first European explorers," said Joan Galli, regional non-game wildlife specialist for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). "They wrote about seeing a great colony of eagles' nests on that island." Eagles,





she points out, don't nest in colonies, although they will take over an unused heron nest sometimes.

A heron colony may also include double-crested cormorants, great egrets, black-crowned night-herons, an occasional yellow-crowned night-heron, songbirds and even — the wolf among the sheep — a great horned owl's nest.

## Cycles or Problems?

Most colonies last only a few decades. There are currently at least 17 active rookeries in Mississippi River Pools 1 through 14, usually situated on islands and in floodplain forests.

Biologist Eric Nelson of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) said it's surprising how quickly a colony can build up and decline. The heron rookery on Beaver Island, near Clinton, Iowa, numbered 1,400 nests (2,800 adult birds) in 1993; last year there were just 36. The rookery on Mertes Slough, near Winona, had 13 nests in 1977, 900 in 1994 and 600 last year.

"There's a fair amount of interchange among nesting colonies," Nelson said, "and no evidence that herons return to the same one every year."

The total number of active nests in Pools 4 through 14 has diminished in the last decade or so, from 8,000 nests in 16 colonies in 1989 to 4,800 nests in 14 colonies in 1997.

"There is speculation that loss of foraging habitat — marshes and wetlands — along the Mississippi River may be pushing herons up into the smaller rivers, where they can catch their food more easily," said Nelson.

The heron population along the river today may be smaller than in 1987, but it's still greater than it was in the 1960s, when DDT, PCBs and heavy metals threatened herons and so many other birds.

But that is not all that is happening. According to USFWS records, the size of the average brood dropped over the past five years, from 2 fledglings per nest in 1994 to 1.7 in 1995, 1.6 in 1996 and 1.4 in 1997. Nelson said this may or may not be the result of a natural population cycle in herons. Time will tell. ❧

*Pamela Eyden is a contributing editor of Big River. Her last article was "Seining for Algae on the St. Croix" (October 1997).*

*Vera Ming Wong drew both of the heron illustrations in this story.*

## Times Change

Crane Island in Lake Minnetonka, west of the Twin Cities, was named for the "blue cranes" that once nested there. This account was written in 1892:

*The island... was evidently densely covered with lofty elms, sugar maples, oaks and basswoods, but the excrement accumulating from year to year, and age to age, has destroyed them until the number left standing has become few and considerably scattered. Since that lake has become a great summer resort, and is constantly plied with some twenty or thirty steamers of various sizes (with whistles loud enough to be heard quite distinctly 15 miles away), three or four times as many full-sailed yachts, to which may be added two or three hundred rowboats, constantly flitting back and forth at all hours of the day and far into the nights, it is a standing surprise that these birds still continue to return year after year to the same familiar spot. However, it must be confessed that from these disturbing causes, to which should be added a long-continued practice of firing pistols at them from the steamers' decks to see the females rise in clouds from their nests, and the robbing them of their eggs by men and boys by the employment of telegraph pole climbing irons to reach them, their numbers became so sensibly reduced as to call in special legislation, some five or six years since, or all would have been destroyed or driven entirely away...*

*From The Report of the First State Zoologist, Accompanied with Notes on the Birds of Minnesota, by Dr. P. L. Hatch. Henry F. Nachtrieb, State Zoologist. The Geological and Natural History Survey of Minnesota, Harrison and Smith, Printers, 1892. ❧*



(Marge's continued from page 1)

"People like the view and we get a lot of fishermen coming in," says Marge Julian, owner and operator of the restaurant for 14 years. "It's nice to look out the window and see bald eagles and waterfowl."

A Wisconsin native, Marge says opening a restaurant was "the last thing I wanted to do, but I moved to a small town and couldn't find work, other than these office jobs that you have until you die. I was not about to do that."

## Where the Buffalo Roam

Marge's most unusual dishes are her buffalo specialties. "We're the only restaurant in town that sells it," Marge says proudly. She's been serving it since shortly after the restaurant opened, when a regular patron who raised the animals suggested she add it to her menu.

Now she sells more buffalo than beef. "We go through a whole buffalo a month, and that's a lot of meat." And there's good reason; buffalo contains less fat and cholesterol than beef. Marge's buffalo are raised nearby, in Brice Prairie.

"You can do everything with buffalo that you can with beef — burgers, sirloin steaks, stew, meatloaf, Swiss steak." Marge serves buffalo daily, but Thursday is Buffalo Night, when everything buffalo is on special.

"People think it'll taste wild and gamy," says Marge, "but it doesn't — it's more like sweet beef."

I would have to agree. The buffalo sirloin steak I ordered was delicious, tender and extremely lean, with a mellower, richer flavor than beef. My companion ordered a buffalo burger, which was succulent. The salads were passable, but the coleslaw, with its delicately flavored dressing, was crunchy and excellent. The American fries that came with my steak were perfect — crisp on the edges and not greasy.

Marge's cooks just about everything from scratch, from soups to coleslaw dressing. "I make my dishes from the freshest ingredi-

ents," Marge says. She buys her meat directly from local farmers and avoids regular feedlot meat, believing "those chemicals and steroids give it a different, off-taste."

Customers rave over Marge's chicken and dumplings, her nut-filled "country cake," and the ample breakfasts, the fanciest of which

*"We go through a whole buffalo a month," says Marge, "and that's a lot of meat."*

feature buffalo sausage and steak with the eggs. Lunches and dinners feature sandwiches, burgers and entrees priced from \$5 to \$7. Besides buffalo and beef, diners can choose from chicken, fish, pork chops, fried walleye cheeks, combination plates and salads.

From the restaurant's main window diners can keep an eye on the vast expanse of Lake Onalaska, which is separated from the Mississippi River's Main Channel by a string of islands. Beyond the river rises the steep Minnesota bluffs near Dresbach. Lake Onalaska, near where the Black River joins the Mississippi, is nationally recognized as a choice bluegill and largemouth bass backwater lake.

Directly below the restaurant is a parking lot for users of the Great River Trail, which runs past the restaurant, but is not visible from the dining room. During spring and summer, this trail between Onalaska and Trempealeau is alive with bicyclists, walkers and runners, and the lake area is lush with vegetation, eagles and the sounds of red-winged blackbirds. On winter weekends, ice-fishing shacks appear by the dozens on the lake, while snowmobilers enjoy the trail. All year around, diners can watch planes land and take off from the nearby La Crosse Municipal Airport on French Island.

Marge's is open seven days a

week, 5:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. daily and 5 to 9 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday evenings. Saturday evenings are reserved for banquets, and Marge's is closed Sunday and Monday evenings. The restaurant seats 95; reservations are taken only for groups of five or more, and they are usually not necessary.

There is not a nonsmoking section, although Marge says she has "very good ventilation and very few people smoke." On the night I dined, however, the restaurant was smoky.

Marge's Lakeview is located at N5135 Highway 35 North, Onalaska; (608) 781-0150.

*Mi Ae Lipe-Butterbrodt is associate editor of Big River. Her last story for the newsletter was "Library Collects River Lore Treasures" (March 1998).*

## Big River™

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# Current Events

By Mi Ae Lipe-Butterbrodt and Molly McGuire

## Short Locks

The Army Corps of Engineers is expected to announce this spring that it will propose small-scale measures, rather than lock expansion, to relieve barge congestion at certain Mississippi River locks.

We have to wait until 1999 for the final Navigation Study report, but the March *Mississippi Monitor* predicts that a preliminary Corps report will reflect a drop in the projected increase of barge traffic on the Mississippi. Last year the Corps

lowered the predicted rate of increase from 2 percent to 1.5 percent annually. Expanding the length of certain locks would not be economical, based on the revised prediction, giving the edge to lower-cost solutions, such as helper boats at busy locks.

River conservation groups claim that any measure designed to eventually accommodate twice as many barges on the river may harm wildlife, and that the Corps has not adequately assessed the impact of increased traffic.

Public meetings are planned for July in river communities.

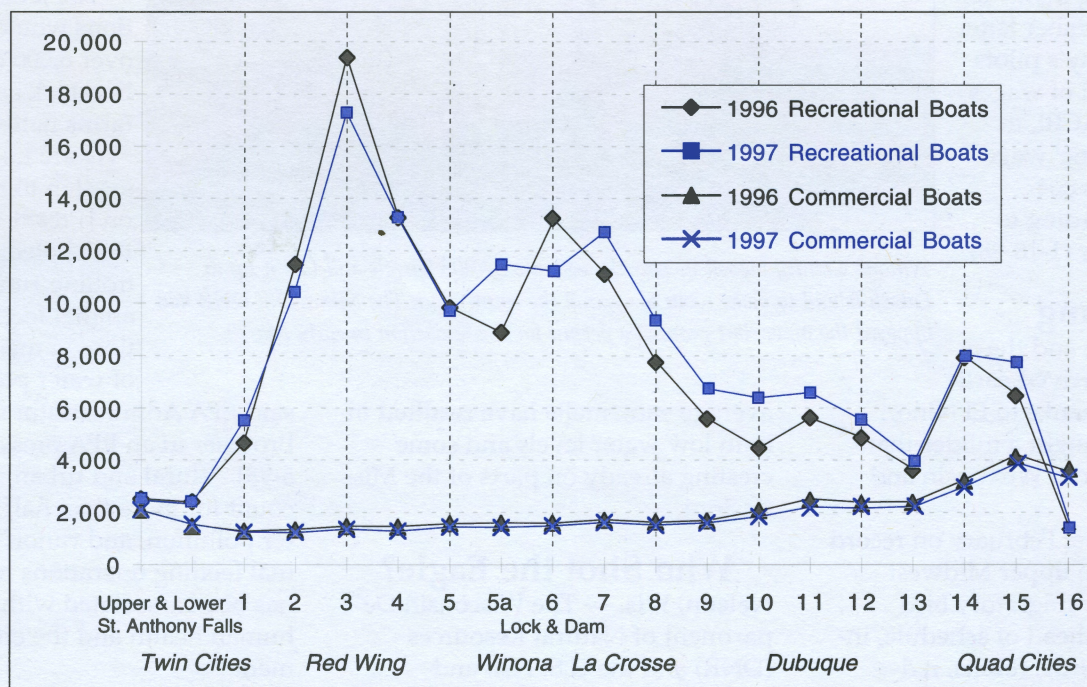
## Barging Out

About 1,400 towboat pilots and captains say they will walk off their jobs this spring unless employers agree to double their wages. Tow pilots want annual salaries of \$60,000 to \$100,000, according to Fred Hunter, an organizer for Pilots Agree, a non-labor-union group.

Tow boat pilots are demanding higher wages to compensate for inflation, reduced benefits and greater responsibilities from larger loads, increased liabilities and stricter maritime regulations.

A successful walkout could halt barge traffic on rivers between

## River Traffic 1996 and 1997: Lockages by Lock and Dam



Boat traffic varies dramatically from lock to lock and year to year. Recreational traffic from Winona, Minn., to Clinton, Iowa, increased in 1997 over 1996, while tow traffic declined.

We extended the chart this year to Lock and Dam 16 to show how recreational traffic drops below commercial traffic on the lower locks and dams.

"Commercial" traffic is mostly tows, but includes passenger boats, dredges, buoy tenders and other large, working boats.

The information for this chart was compiled from summaries provided by the St. Paul District and the Rock Island District of the Army Corps of Engineers.



Pittsburgh and St. Louis, from Tulsa and Minneapolis to New Orleans. The strike could disrupt transport of oil, fertilizer and coal during the critical spring planting season.

But many shipping and barge company officials are skeptical of a walkout actually taking place, saying that Pilots Agree is distorting facts about benefit reductions and salaries not keeping up with living costs. David Stokes, president of Stokes Towing Co., of Greenville, Mississippi, doubts the walkout would completely shut down river traffic. "They [tow boat pilots] live from paycheck to paycheck, and I don't know how long they could survive without one" (Knight-Ridder 2-28-98).

At least one major employer, American Commercial Barge Lines (ACBL) has rejected the wage-doubling demands, calling them "absurd." A December letter to the company's pilots said "the level of wages would force ACBL to pass 'unrealistic' wage increases onto customers," according to Knight-Ridder (1-18-98).

## Sprung

Birds, wildlife and the river's crest arrived earlier this year, thanks to El Nino, which has brought a milder-than-normal winter to Wisconsin and Minnesota.

The warmest February on record in much of the upper Midwest brought many migratory bird species back ahead of schedule, including bluebirds, robins, red-winged blackbirds, grackles, woodpeckers, Canada geese and tundra swans.

In early March, Minnesota and Wisconsin birding networks reported woodcock, sandhill cranes, blackbirds and gulls returning early.

Birders also reported that many

species that normally migrate from the Midwest overwintered here this year or did not fly as far south, then returned.

Larger wildlife, such as deer and elk, had an easier time finding food as well. Neither deer nor birds relied as much on outdoor feeders, since their natural foods were more available. Temperatures have been so warm that even maple-tappers have been out collecting sap since mid-February in some areas.

Snow cover in northern and central Minnesota and Wisconsin was as thin as one to five inches. Below-



*Winona County moved its courthouse onto 32,008 barrels and tied it up to Latsch Island to make room to expand the county jail. The Minnesota DNR had opposed the move, but granted a permit for the relocation in early March.*

average snowmelts have resulted in both low water levels and some cresting already on parts of the Mississippi.

## Who Shot the Eagle?

**Nelson, Wis.** — The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service want to know who shot a bald eagle between Nelson and Pepin, Wis. A \$2,500 reward funded by the federal Eagle Act is being offered for information leading to a conviction.

The eagle was found February 10 near the Burlington Northern and

Santa Fe railroad tracks, according to DNR conservation warden William Wrasse. The spot is near where the Chippewa and Mississippi Rivers meet between Nelson and Pepin.

The bald eagle is protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Eagle Act and Wisconsin law. Anyone with information should call Wrasse, (715) 672-8476; the WDNR Tip Hotline, 800-847-9367; or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, (608) 221-1206.

## Feedlot Furor

**Washington, D.C.** — Owners of large cattle feedlots and hog and poultry farms will soon have to comply with forthcoming manure control regulations set by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The federal regulations would affect over 6,000 commercial livestock and poultry farms nationwide. "We are taking a major step to make good on [President Clinton's] pledge by controlling runoff from animal feeding operations, a major source of water pollution,"

said EPA Administrator Carol M. Browner in an EPA press release (3-5-98). "Rural and urban runoff account for more than half of all water pollution, and runoff from animal feeding operations in particular has been associated with threats to human health and the environment."

The new regulations would require feedlot operations and poultry farms to obtain Clean Water Act permits over the next four to seven years and, if necessary, to implement more extensive manure storage facilities.

Opposition to the EPA proposals



includes Wisconsin State Senators Brian Rude and Dale Schultz, who claim that the regulations would have an adverse economic effect on farms with as few as 70 dairy cows, 300 beef cattle or 200 hogs and may put some family farms out of business.

The largest farms would have to comply with the regulations by 2002, and the rest by 2005, according to the *La Crosse Tribune* (3-7-98).

## Resources for Educators

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is distributing water education resource kits to schools statewide. Targeted to fifth through ninth grades, the interdisciplinary materials in the "Aquatic Illinois" kits cover a wide variety of water-related resources. Included are full-color fact sheets on frogs and toads, posters of aquatic wildlife, videos and fish cutouts. You can check out kits at Illinois state libraries and at some Illinois state parks. For more information on Illinois DNR educational resources, call (217) 524-4126, or visit the web site.

Also in Illinois, the Rivers Curriculum Project of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville has published the Rivers Biology Curriculum Guide, a hands-on guide to stream monitoring. The biology guide joins the chemistry, earth science and geography guides, all with the purpose of increasing scientific literacy through river study.

The Rivers Project is sponsoring a summer teacher training workshop on urban rivers this July in Chicago. For information on the curriculum units or the training, call (618) 692-3788, or check out its web site.

A big multifaceted celebration is planned this summer by the Mississippi River Parkway Commission, the Smithsonian River of Song Project and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Educational projects include a science conference and special displays

throughout the summer. Check the Big River calendar for celebration events and times, as well as other environmental education conferences in our area.

## You Could Be a Winner

The Mississippi River Multimedia Climate Competition is looking for original works dealing with climatic, hydrologic or other natural events on the river. Top prize is \$4,000. Submissions are due April 15. For information call (314) 533-8083 or email [sistolar@jracademy.com](mailto:sistolar@jracademy.com) or visit our web link.

A Clean Water Day poster contest is open for junior and senior high students. The first prize is a custom surfboard. The deadline is May 1, 1998. For details call (408) 476-7667.

## Jet Ski Attacks

Bills are pending in several state legislatures to regulate personal watercraft operation on lakes and rivers. According to the online newsletter *The Personal Watercraft Zone*, almost every state has initiated legislation.

As of February, seven bills were initiated in the Minnesota House and nine in the Senate, and six each in the Wisconsin Senate and Assembly, according to the *Waterways Journal* (3-2-98).

## Clamming Curbed

**Iowa** — The Iowa Natural Resources Commission has voted 5-to-1 to stop the harvest of washboard mussels until its population rebounds. The mussel is in trouble, probably due to a variety of causes — including barge traffic, pollution and zebra mussels — but, according to a member of the commission, the harvest is the only factor they can do anything about.

Meanwhile, the Iowa legislature is looking at a bill that would continue the harvest for five more years while studies continue, according to the *Dubuque Telegraph Herald* (3-13-98).

## Twisty Whitewater

**Weaver, Minn.** — A proposed change to three miles of the Whitewater River in southeast Minnesota may reduce sediment entering the Mississippi at Weaver Bottoms, an area that has suffered from excess siltation.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) wants to restore a straightened stretch of the lower part of the river to its former twisted glory, providing better trout habitat and more floodplain for depositing silt. The Whitewater's channel was straightened in the 1950s to create pools for waterfowl habitat. The project would not disturb the pools.

The DNR plans to hold public meetings in late May or June and proposes to start the project in late summer if funding comes through.

## Do you have an answer?

Readers asked us a couple of questions this month that we can't answer. Can you?

What is the website that has video cam shots from the source of the Mississippi to New Orleans? Send us the URL if you know.

What is the derivation of the word "slough"?

If we get the answers, we'll put them in next month's Current events.

## Mine Moratorium

**Wisconsin** — Governor Tommy Thompson announced that he will sign a mining moratorium bill this month.

The bill requires mining companies that want to operate in the state to prove that a mine similar to the one they propose has operated for 10 years without harming the environment.

## Web Site Links

Every month we put links to all of the web sites referred to in Current Events on the Big River web site ([big-river.com](http://big-river.com)). ■■■





# River Calendar

## Special Events & Festivals

### April

- 17-May 10, Earthday Art Show, spons. by Mississippi River Revival, Winona (Minn.) Arts Center deadline, April 10, (608) 525-2915 or (507) 457-0393.
- 19 Stop the Reroute of Highway 55 rally, noon, 54th St. trailhead, Minneapolis, (612) 699-5755.
- 19 Earth Day Hikes, Hixon Forest Nature Center, La Crosse, Wis., (608) 526-6699.
- 22 Earth Day.
- 25 Spring Bird Release, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m., French Regional Park, Plymouth, Minn., (612) 624-4745.
- 25 Minneapolis city-wide river cleanup, 9:30 a.m., several locations, Mississippi Corridor Neighborhood Coalition, (612) 788-0249.
- 25 Iowa Sandhill Crane Count, contact Jaime (515) 432-2823.

### May

- 1-3 Dutch Days, Fulton, Illinois.
- 2 Nahant Marsh Clean-up Day, River Action, Quad Cities, (319) 322-2969.
- 2 Greening Project Tree Planting, 8:30 a.m. - 1 p.m., across from downtown St. Paul, Minn., register by April 10, (612) 224-9885.
- 2-3 85-mile garage sale, cities surrounding Lake Pepin, (715) 442-3011.
- 7-8 War Eagle Days, La Crosse, Wis.
- 9 Dubuque Audubon Society Field Trip, Spring Species Count and Birdathon.
- 9-16 National River Cleanup Week, American Outdoors, (423) 558-3595.
- 10 International Migratory Bird Day.
- 15-17 Dubuquefest, Dubuque, Iowa.
- 16 Reggae Sunsplash, Trempealeau, Wis.
- 16 Clean Up Our River Environment (CURE) Observation Trip on Minnesota River, (320) 269-2105.
- 21-24 Sunfish Days, Onalaska, Wis.
- 23-25 Flea Market and Arts and Crafts, Marquette and McGregor, Iowa.
- 28-30 Bass Tournament, La Crosse, Wis.

**West Coon Rapids Dam, Brooklyn Park, Minn., (612) 424-8172.**

### April

- 4 Duck Walk Along the River, 9 a.m.
- 26 Talk with Turtles, 1 p.m. - 4 p.m.

### May

- 3 Warblers to Waterbirds, 10 a.m.
- 9 Dog Walk Along the River, 1 p.m.
- 10 Secrets of River Bugs, 1 p.m. - 4 p.m.
- 17 Spring Bird Count, 7 a.m.

## Meetings & Hearings

### April

- 2 Rivers Council of Minnesota, quarterly meeting, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m., St. James Hotel, Red Wing, (218) 547-3675.
- 13 Izaak Walton League, Will Dilg Chapter, 7 p.m., Waters Hall, SMU, Winona, Minn., (507) 454-5486.
- 14-15 Lower Mississippi River Conservation Committee annual meeting, Memphis, Tenn., (601) 629-6602.
- 18 The Nature Conservancy annual meeting, presentation by author Bill Holm, Minnesota History Center, register by April 10, (612) 331-0762.
- 22 Quad Cities Propeller Club, Captain's Night, The Dock, (319) 324-0418.
- 23-24 Upper Mississippi River Research Consortium annual meeting, Yacht Club Resorts, La Crosse, Wis.

### May

- 29-30 Midwest Riverboat Buffs, Ramada Inn at the Arch, St. Louis, (314) 725-9467.

## Workshops & Conferences

### April

- 3-5 Sierra Club Wisconsin spring retreat, MacKenzie Ed. Center, Poynette, (608) 788-3914.
- 15-17 American Wetlands Month Conference, Arlington, Va., 1-800-726-4853.
- 24-26 Izaak Walton League, Minnesota Division, annual convention, Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center, Lanesboro, Minn., (612) 221-0215.
- 29 River Monitors Youth Congress, Camp Ripley, Minn., volunteers needed, (218) 547-3675.

### May

- 1-2 Nurturing Wisconsin's Waterways, De Pere, Wis., 1-800-443-6159.
- 3-6 Watershed Management: Moving from Theory to Implementation, Denver, Co., (703) 684-2400.
- 14-16 Friends of Trashed Rivers, Coalition to Restore Urban Waters, New Orleans, La., (504) 280-6680.
- 15-17 Becoming an Outdoors Woman, Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center, Lanesboro, Minn., 1-800-MIN-NDNR or (612) 296-6157.

### June

- 23-25 Catfish 2000 Symposium, River Center, Davenport, Iowa, (309) 582-5613.

## Teachers' Workshops

- June 10-12 Mississippi River Science Teachers' Climate Workshop, St. Louis, (314) 516-6200.
- June 19-20 Minnesota Environmental Education Conference, St. John's U., Collegeville, (218) 726-8808.

## Exploration of the Mississippi River.

- June 15-17 Nauvoo, Ill., (319) 463-7673.
- July 8-10 Wyalusing State Park, Prairie du Chien, Wis., (319) 872-4945 or (608) 785-9005.

**Rivers Curriculum Project of Southern Ill. University Edwardsville (SIUE), (618) 692-3359.**

July 19-24 Chicago.

Aug. 2-7 Edwardsville, Ill. ■■

## Almanac

*By Kenny Salwey*

The wild untameable winds of March have been exiled to the far north. In their place have come the gentler, warmer breezes of April, the month of promise.

On warm, sunny days one can smell the earth. Some green things are up yawning and stretching toward the sun. The life blood of the trees pulses strongly. Silver maples and river birch stand pregnant with plump buds and the promise of fresh green leaves next month. In the backwaters, willow branches are studded with tiny white cotton balls called "pussy willows." Cut some of these, add some red dogwood twigs, mix in a few spears of green grass and presto — a lovely springtime bouquet.

Most of the birds are through strutting their stuff and are settling down to family life. The same is true of the mammals, while the frogs, turtles and snakes seem to be watching everyone work as they kick back in the sun, lounging about on logs, stumps and shoreline beaches in perfect contentment.

April showers come and go, giving the river new life. If the showers don't become deluges, our thoughts will turn to fishing, gardening and birding. ■■